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Matthew 6:24-34

Under the Father's Care

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? **26** Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? **27** Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? **28** "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. **29** Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. **30** If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **31** So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' **32** For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **33** But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. **34** Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Lilies do not have mortgages

This week, I planned to preach a sermon on why we should not worry. I was going to talk about how most of our fear is only in our imagination. I was even going to share a story about a man who was convinced he had an unexploded WWI bomb in his hand. David Page of Norfolk, England had dug up the device and then picked it up to examine what it was. When he realized it was a bomb, he was afraid that letting go would detonate the device. While holding the bomb, the terrified 40-year-old called an emergency operator on his mobile phone. He even used the call to issue his last words for his family. "The woman police operator kept saying it would be okay," said Page, "but I kept saying to her, 'You're not the one holding the bomb.'" First responders rushed to the work-yard in eastern England. Army bomb disposal experts arrived as well. The drama came to an abrupt end when the "bomb" was identified. It was part of the hydraulic suspension system from a car." I was going to say, that like Page we are often afraid for nothing.

However, as I was finishing the sermon Abigail ran into my office, slipped on the rug, and bit through her lip. As I saw the blood fill her mouth, I got worried. I was ready to call 911. It was simply a bloody lip. I knew that. However, it did not stop me from worrying. In fact, after Abigail was okay, I went to the store and bought seven different types of popsicles to make her (and really to make me) feel better.

I share this because whether it is real or imaginative, worry has a powerful affect over us. If we think we have a bomb in our hands, simple words will not work. And if we do have a bomb in our hands, simple words will not work. Even Jesus' words about the lilies don't completely help because lilies do not have mortgages.

And so what are we to do when we worry? What are we to do when like Eve we find ourselves trusting the devil's words instead of God's words? What are we to do when we worry like the Gentiles?

Play the glad game???

Many preachers will tell you to overcome your worry. Joel Olsteen gives seven positive steps to take in order to have your best life now. In his second book, Olsteen gives seven steps to become a better you. Leo Tolstoy suggests giving away all those things that trap you. If your mortgage traps you, give it away and find freedom. Pollyanna tells you to play the glad game. Be thankful for all that you have. Then you will not worry.

The problem is that these things do not work. If Olsteen's book actually worked, he would not have needed to write a second book. When Tolstoy gave everything away, his life became worse. Pollyanna's suggestions only work in Disney movies. Lilies do not have mortgages.

Jesus knows this. Jesus also knows that at the heart of worry is our sinful nature that does not trust God. And so Jesus speaks. Jesus begins by asking five questions that are meant to put things in perspective. Listen to verse 25 and following:

Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?
26Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? **27**Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? **28**"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. **29**Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. **30**If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

There are two statements that are especially important in these verses. The first is that Jesus refers to God as "your heavenly Father." This is important because when things go bad, it is easy to see God as a judge who is punishing us because we have sinned. If that were true then God would have to punish all of us. The last time I checked, it rains on the just and the unjust.

Others see God as a miser who only provides the necessities of life and nothing more. There might be times when God simply provides for our daily needs, but God constantly gives us more than we need. As the catechism reminds us:

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

A second important phrase is that Jesus calls his disciples "You of little faith" (v. 30). It has been said, "If you ever want to look good, just compare yourself to the disciples." These are Jesus' disciples. These are the ones who saw Jesus turn water into wine. These are the ones who saw Jesus feed the 5000. These are the ones with little faith. Do not let anyone tell you to knock off your worrying. If the disciples worried, you will too. Playing the glad game doesn't work. Lilies do not have mortgages.

The only antidote to worry

There is only one antidote to worry. In verse 33, Jesus says, "Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Each phrase is important. The word "seek" is in the present tense. "The kingdom of God and his righteousness" refers to Jesus. The kingdom of God is the reign of Jesus Christ. All throughout the gospel of Matthew we hear about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people (Matthew 4:23 & 9:35)

The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (4:16-17).

As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' **8**Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give (10:7-8).

Forty-eight times, in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the divine action of God coming near in the person of Jesus to save us. The name Jesus means "God saves his people."

When Jesus says, "Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness", he is inviting us to constantly seek Jesus in the places he has promised to be found. We are to seek Jesus in the Scriptures and the Sacraments. It is in the waters of baptism, where God says to us, "You are a keeper." It is in his Word that he speaks comfort and consolation. It is at the table where we are told over and over again that we are forgiven. It is in these places where we begin to experience the kingdom of God. It is here where God is revealed to us as a loving father and not some judge or miser.

It is when we know that God is our heavenly father that the promise comes true "and all these things will be given to you as well." In truth, these things are always added to us. But in Christ we begin to see that the hand of God is not the hand of a taskmaster. Rather, it is the hand of a savior that was nailed for us. The hand of God is the hand of a loving father who daily and abundantly gives us all things. It is only then that our anxiety stills.

Conclusion

Reformation, do not be anxious about what you are to eat, drink, and wear. Of course you will be anxious. The lilies do not have mortgages. However, your heavenly father knows this. He knows your needs. He is a loving father who constantly gives you more than you deserve. Seek the kingdom of God. Seek Christ. See in him the love of the father, who daily and richly provides for you.

**In Jesus' Name,
Amen**